

VZCZCXRO6734
PP RUEHTRO
DE RUEHAS #0317/01 0771057
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 171057Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5460
INFO RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 8863
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2619
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2242
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7094
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6291
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1525
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0474
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3324
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 000317

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: DESPERATION FUELS INCREASE IN SUICIDES

REF: 07 ALGIERS 1704

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas F. Daughton;
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Suicide, though a significant sin in Islam, is on the rise in Algeria. Sociologist Nacer Djabi warned that socioeconomic discontent was creating a developing "suicide mentality" in Algeria (reftel) even among young Algerians, and official statistics indicate suicide was an increased concern in 2007. New attention has been paid to the issue in mosque sermons and press conferences, as the mentality Djabi spoke of provides fertile ground for extremist recruiting and the acceptance of extreme risk to flee the country by sea. Suicide attacks, a new phenomenon in Algeria, have also brought more attention to the issue. The phenomenon has not gone unnoticed by the international community -- the French Cultural Center in Algiers organized a February 21 conference, attended by several Algerian and French sociologists, psychologists and students, to discuss the increase in suicides in Algeria. Despite the recent increase in the number of suicides, no formal prevention or information campaigns have been launched to address the problem. END SUMMARY.

SUICIDE IN ALGERIA: STATISTICS AND CONTEXT

¶2. (U) According to the November 2007 report by the national police (DGSN), more than 450 cases of suicide were reported in Algeria in 2007. This represented a more than 20-percent increase over the 369 suicides recorded in 2006. The DGSN report asserted that suicide was widely considered and discussed as an option among Algeria's poor. 63 percent of those who committed suicide in 2007 were jobless, according to the DGSN report. The report also noted that 12 percent were public servants, 8 percent were self-employed and 6 percent were university students.

¶3. (U) In a January 29 press conference, Kheira Messaoudane, a senior member of the Judicial Police (a branch of the DGSN), stated that between 2006 and 2007 the number of suicides among minors between the age of 10 and 18 had sharply increased, resulting in 16 deaths out of 114 attempts. A December 2007 National Gendarmerie report stated that Bejaia, on the coast east of Algiers, was the province most affected by suicide, followed by the province of Tizi Ouzou in the violence-plagued Kabylie region.

¶4. (C) Dr. Mustapha Khiati, president of the Algerian health

NGO Forem, contests the official statistics released by the DGSN. In a February 10 conversation, he asserted that the actual number of suicides was higher than official figures indicated. Dr. Khiati listed several ongoing problems in Algeria, including the country's housing crisis, its high rate of unemployment and "cultural vacuum," along with drug use and mental health problems as factors that have driven more Algerians to commit suicide. Since the April 11, 2007, suicide bombings in Algiers, the local press has reported on the living and social conditions of individuals involved in suicide attacks throughout the country. Five suicide bombers lived in the shantytowns of two Algerian suburbs, Oued Ouchayeh and Bourouba. Most of the bombers have been young. In June 2007, the press reported that 13 potential suicide-bombers aged 13 to 18 had been sentenced by a court of Boumerdes (just east of Algiers) to three years' imprisonment. The young people had been recruited by terrorist groups to carry out attacks and they provided logistical support to terrorist cells across the country.

SUICIDE IN A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

15. (C) Algeria's religious community is sensitized to the country's suicide phenomenon. Abdelhamid Qaba, imam of the mosque in the Bab Ezzouar neighborhood of Algiers (where two suicide bombs were detonated on April 11), told us February 23 that print media are largely responsible for suicides in Algeria. Qaba opined that the print media publish the methods and techniques of committing suicide and that this incited young people to kill themselves -- including the "harraga," Algerians who try to escape to Europe in small boats (reftel). Qaba also ascribed the increase in suicides

ALGIERS 00000317 002 OF 002

to a spiritual emptiness among the population, which he said was increasingly turning away from religion. Qaba added that many of the individuals that have turned away from religion have done so because of their misinterpretation of certain key concepts, which has resulted in some individuals turning to violence to justify their perspectives. Throughout the past year, he said, several Friday sermons have been devoted to the subject of suicide as a way to sensitize the population.

16. (C) COMMENT: Algeria's political and economic situation continues to stagnate, but instead of simply grumbling or emigrating, a small but growing number of Algerians are taking their lives. The Islamic taboo on suicide and the dishonor it traditionally brings upon the family likely keeps the official statistics artificially low, and the figures would certainly be higher if all attempted suicides were considered, according to Khiati. As the general population continues to feel that there are few social and economic opportunities for them in a stagnant economy, we expect to see a continued increase in the number of people who opt to remove themselves from Algerian society through suicide.

FORD